
RESTORATIVE JUSTICE: INVESTIGATING PUBLIC ATTITUDES AND NEEDS IN RESTORATIVE JUSTICE CONFERENCING

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Abstract

In recent years, restorative justice (RJ) has emerged as a transformative paradigm within the criminal justice system, emphasizing healing, recognition, and collective resolution involving victims, offenders, and the community. Restorative Justice Conferencing (RJC), a crucial component of RJ, facilitates dialogue among key stakeholders, particularly young offenders, victims, and their supporters. Central to the successful implementation of RJC is the active involvement of the public, especially the families of victims, as highlighted by compelling research into victim needs.

This study aims to address the research question: "To what extent does the public want to be involved in the restorative justice process and why?" Hypotheses posit that family members with a more positive attitude towards RJ are more willing to participate, and those with higher emotional and informational needs exhibit greater willingness.

Through an extensive examination of attitudes, emotional and informational needs, and motivations for engagement, this research unravels nuanced insights into factors influencing the public's willingness to participate in RJC. Findings suggest a significant relationship between positive attitudes, particularly towards resocialization, and actual participation. Emotional and informational needs emerge as critical predictors of willingness, underlining the necessity for tailored support services. The qualitative outcomes shed light on the significance of emotional connection, belief in justice, and existing reservations. Notably, personal experiences with sexual offenses did not strongly impact openness to RJC, challenging preconceptions. The comprehensive exploration of these elements contributes to a holistic understanding of the intricate dynamics surrounding public attitudes toward RJC.

In conclusion, this research provides valuable insights into the multifaceted considerations that shape the public's inclination to participate in RJC. The findings emphasize the importance of tailoring support services based on emotional and informational needs, paving the way for a more inclusive and effective implementation of restorative justice practices.

Introduction

Criminal justice has long been the predominant approach to address criminal offenses. Crime encompasses actions that cause social harm or violate human rights, irrespective of whether they are legally sanctioned or involve unlawful behaviour, that draw attention to both police and media (Eadie et al., 2003; Umbreit et al., 2002). The criminal justice system is a set of government processes designed to enforce laws, investigate crimes, prosecute and defend individuals accused of crime, and impose penalties on those found guilty (Cross, 2009). Its goal is to maintain public safety, hold individuals accountable for their actions while protecting their rights, and to promote fairness and justice (Bernard & Engel, 2001). The traditional justice process focuses on determining guilt or innocence in a formal and structured process. The steps go from the initial investigation of crime through the trial and penalties for the convicted individuals. When a person is accused of crime, they are considered as innocent, unless there is scientific and medical evidence proving the guilt (Sanders et al., 2010). The primary focus is on determining guilt and imposing punishment if the accused person is found guilty. The punishment, encompassing measures like fines, probation, and arrest, serves multiple purposes within the criminal justice system. These include deterring criminal behavior, rehabilitating offenders, compensating victims, meting out appropriate consequences, preventing further crimes, and safeguarding the community. The choice of specific punitive measures depends on the nature and severity of the offense, as well as considerations of fairness and effectiveness in achieving these overarching goals (Eadie et al., 2003).

In conclusion, the criminal justice system, traditionally focused on establishing guilt and administering punishment through measures such as fines, probation, and arrest, aims to maintain public safety, hold individuals accountable, and promote fairness and justice. However, evolving perspectives recognize the need for a more holistic approach, considering rehabilitation, victim compensation, and community safety in tandem with punitive measures. Striking a balance between accountability and comprehensive societal well-being remains a continual challenge for the criminal justice system.

Restorative Justice

In recent years, an alternative response to dealing with crime and conflict has gained recognition, namely restorative justice (RJ). This shift in perspective acknowledges the limitations of the traditional criminal justice system, which primarily focuses on punitive measures to establish guilt and administer consequences. Restorative justice introduces a more comprehensive approach that emphasizes rehabilitation, victim compensation, and community safety alongside accountability. It represents a holistic approach that fundamentally reconceptualizes crime as an offense against individuals and relationships. In contrast to traditional punitive models, RJ places a strong emphasis on humanity and inclusivity, prioritizing the restoration of connections over merely addressing legal violations (Umbreit et al., 2002). This transformative paradigm has evolved from an additional measure to becoming a part of the criminal justice system (Jonas-van Dijk et al., 2020). The RJ process involves three primary stakeholders: the victim, the offender, and the community. Involving all parties with a stake in a particular offense to collectively resolve how to address the aftermath and its implications for the future is necessary to reach justice (McCold & Wachtel, 2012; Van Camp & Wemmers, 2013; Marshall, 1996; Jonas-van Dijk et al., 2020).

RJ envisions a more active role for the victim in justice decisions, not dealing with the fact-finding phase (McAlinden, 2008), but aimed at healing and recognition (Van Camp & Wemmers, 2013). As the core values revolve around the principles of healing and recognition, RJ focuses on determining offender responsibility, repairing harm, emphasizing victim empathy, promoting accountability, voluntary, dialogue-driven processes, and fostering healing (Hayes, 2005; Jonas-van Dijk et al., 2020; Umbreit et al., 2002). Engaging in practices like apologies, restitution, acknowledgment of harm, and efforts to heal and reintegrate offenders into their communities is integral to this restorative framework (Braithwaite et al., 2013). In essence, restorative justice offers a transformative paradigm that prioritizes the active involvement of victims, healing, and recognition over traditional punitive approaches. By focusing on achieving its goals, restorative justice strives to create a justice system that emphasizes empathy, accountability, and the holistic well-being of both victims and offenders, ultimately seeking a more balanced and inclusive path to justice.

Encounters between victims and offenders in the RJ process yield notable outcomes, with victims experiencing lower levels of fear and anger compared to traditional criminal justice proceedings (Rossner, 2008; Van Camp & Wemmers, 2013). Additionally, victims engaging with their offenders more frequently receive apologies, exhibit greater forgiveness, express more sympathy toward the offender, and are less inclined toward physical revenge

compared to those who do not participate in such encounters (Rossner, 2008). On the offenders' side, reports indicate high levels of satisfaction and fairness compared to traditional justice processes (Rossner, 2008). Additionally, outcomes for offenders extend beyond punishment to include acknowledgment of responsibility, dialogue with victims, sincere apologies, rehabilitation, community reintegration, reduced recidivism, personal growth, and empathy development. The process aims to address the root causes of criminal behavior and foster positive changes in offenders, emphasizing healing and restoration alongside accountability (Latimer, et al., 2005).

Restorative Justice Conferencing

Among the diverse array of restorative justice models, Restorative Justice Conferencing (RJC) stands out as a notable approach, embodying principles of healing, accountability, and dialogue in its unique form of resolution. Conferences are facilitated discussions to ensure fairness and active participation, encompassing preamble, conference, and agreement phases (McCold & Wachtel, 2012). This structured conversation delves into the details of the offense, its impact, and collaborative efforts to repair the harm caused by the crime. The primary objective is to involve victims into the justice process, offering a secure space for victims to confront offenders, articulate the impact of the crime, and propose ways for offenders to address the harm they have inflicted (Braithwaite et al., 2013). The emphasis on reparation allows negotiations between offenders, victims, and their supporters to repair the harm caused, with the overarching aim being restoration, mending the damage inflicted by the crime.

RJC serve several crucial purposes, as it uncovers the harm caused, understands the origins of the harmful incident, facilitates acknowledgment, apologies, and amends by those responsible, aid harmed individuals in regaining dignity and safety, and initiate healing for individuals, relationships, and communities (Braithwaite et al., 2013). It serves as a holistic and collaborative approach to addressing offenses, placing significant emphasis on accountability, reparative actions, and community involvement (McCold & Wachtel, 2012; McAlinden, 2008). The active involvement of the community in these conferences contributes to the restorative process, providing an opportunity for offenders to be reintegrated into society. The community's representation should encompass individuals who can see the positive aspects of the offender, facilitating the separation of the person from the committed act and increasing the likelihood of successful reintegration (Jonas-van Dijk et al., 2020). Moreover, RJC plays an essential role in facilitating a meaningful dialogue between young

offenders, victims, and their supporters (Hayes, 2005). The effectiveness of RJC relies on securing cooperation from victims, offenders, their supporters, and communities (Braithwaite et al., 2013).

While preventing future offending has not historically been a central goal of restorative justice, proponents argue that achieving key objectives such as accountability, reparation, restoration, and addressing victim needs can contribute to a reduced likelihood of young offenders reoffending (Hayes, 2005). Studies comparing assigned treatments indicate that, especially for violent offenders, those engaged in RJC exhibit lower rates of reoffending compared to those processed through the conventional court system (Hayes, 2005). Although there have been few documented cases of survivors of general crime engaging in these conferences, the potential benefits for survivors are noteworthy. Meta-analyses consistently show a significant reduction in reoffending rates among participants in RJC, considering factors such as adverse early experiences and subsequent life events (Umbreit et al., 2002).

The way the public perceives and supports RJC reflects a broader understanding of its potential benefits for those who have experienced harm, emphasizing the importance of victim well-being in the justice process. Therefore, public attitudes towards RJC reveal insights into victim empowerment and decreased post-traumatic stress symptoms for participants (Marsh & Wager, 2015). The imperative role of including the public, particularly the families of victims, in the RJ process is emphasized by compelling findings derived from extensive research into the needs of victims. In the context of crime or traumatic incidents, family members are often recognized as secondary victims (Ward & Brown, 2004). The term refers to individuals who are not directly affected by a traumatic event but experience significant emotional, psychological, or social consequences as a result of their relationship with the primary victim. Therefore, families of survivors and perpetrators may feel equally harmed by the offence (Marsh & Wager, 2015). Understanding the experiences of family members as secondary victims is crucial in providing comprehensive support and addressing the broader effects of crime on individuals and their social networks.

Previous studies consistently identify a fundamental need among victims — the profound desire for emotional support throughout the justice process (Ten Boom & Kuijpers, 2012). Victims express it as the need for someone willing to listen sympathetically and offer friendly support without judgment, highlighting the importance of confiding in trusted friends or family members (Stiller & Hellmann, 2017). The research indicates that victims often wish for someone to talk to and frequently express a need for support from both parents and professionals. Peers, parents, and psychotherapists are recognized as the most frequently

mentioned sources of helpful social support (Stiller & Hellmann, 2017). This emphasizes the significance of incorporating a supportive network, including family members, in the RJ process to address the emotional needs of victims effectively. Additionally, victims underscore the significance of being believed, particularly by their own family members, representing a primary wish or need (Stiller & Hellmann, 2017). Other studies reveal that positive support from non-offending parents or caregivers following disclosure serves a crucial protective function for the mental health of victims. A significant proportion of victims (44.9%) reported that discussing the offense contributed to improving their well-being (Stiller & Hellmann, 2017). With other words, families emerge as a critical support system, providing essential comfort and understanding to victims navigating the challenging and emotionally charged aftermath of a crime. The inclusion of family members in the RJ process aligns with the identified needs of victims, fostering an environment that acknowledges the importance of emotional support and encourages the healing process (Van Camp & Wemmers, 2013).

Although including families and friends of victims in the justice process seems important, a gap in research exist that examines if there is a need for this group for participating in this process. While there is a substantial body of research exploring the needs of the victims, there is a noticeable deficiency in comprehensive research specifically dedicated to understanding the perspectives and requirements of the broader public in RJ scenarios. The predominant focus of many RJ studies on individual experiences, often centered around the victim-offender relationship (McCold & Wachtel, 2012), has inadvertently overlooked the crucial role played by families as a support system. The previous paragraph recognizes families as a critical support system for victims navigating the challenging aftermath of a crime, highlighting their importance in the healing process. Consequently, the lack of comprehensive research addressing the specific needs and perspectives of families in the restorative justice process represents a notable gap.

In the broader context, RJ interventions are designed to meet the real needs of victims, offenders, and their communities created by the criminal act (Latimer et al., 2005). The goals of RJ align with fostering satisfaction among victims and offenders alike, as seen in comparisons between traditional justice systems and restorative processes (Rossner, 2008; Latimer et al., 2005). By undertaking research that focuses explicitly on the needs and perspectives of the broader public, with an emphasis on families of victims, this study seeks to contribute valuable insights into the dynamics of restorative justice. Understanding the extent to which the public has a need to be involved in the restorative justice process and the underlying motivation for this involvement is essential for developing more inclusive and

effective RJ practices. Bridging this research gap is instrumental in advancing the field, fostering a more holistic understanding of the restorative justice landscape, and ultimately enhancing the support available to victims and their families. The Research Question can be defined as “*To what extent do family members of victims want to be involved in the restorative justice conferencing and why?*”

Attitude

Probably, participants' attitudes play a crucial role in their decision to participate in RJC. These attitudes are shaped by factors such as personal experiences, cultural influences, and individual beliefs (Taylor & Bailey, 2022). Attitude, in this context, can be defined as an overall evaluation of the appropriateness of specific sanctions following specific events of harm and wrongdoing. It is an essential aspect of understanding public perception and also serves as a means of assessing their willingness and acceptance of RJ interventions.

Understanding public attitudes is particularly critical when delving into specific contexts, such as sexual offenses, where the community has demonstrated a punitive attitude toward sex offenders (Marsh & Wager, 2015). However, findings also indicate that both families of victims and survivors of sexual violence express positive attitudes towards the use of RJ in these cases. This positive attitude toward RJ is crucial, as individuals who hold positive views typically believe in the effectiveness and value of the process. They may see it as an opportunity for personal growth and change, fostering a higher level of empathy and understanding towards the experience of victims (Taylor & Bailey, 2022). On the contrary, negative attitudes may stem from doubts about the process's effectiveness or apprehensions regarding its impact on justice outcomes. This dynamic between positive and negative attitudes further highlights the nuanced nature of public perception and acceptance of RJ.

Furthermore, the community, with parents being particularly noteworthy, places a higher value on apology and restitution over the punitive measures directed at offenders, signalling a shift in emphasis towards restorative approaches (Merkel, 2020; McCold & Wachtel, 2012). However, it is crucial to acknowledge a significant research gap in understanding the attitudes of individuals, particularly among family members of victims, towards RJ. Limited research in this area highlights the need to investigate the attitudes of victims' families to gauge their willingness and acceptance of RJ interventions. Research has shown that individuals with a positive attitude towards resocialization are more willing to engage in RJ, and those individuals with a more positive attitude towards RJ are more willing

to participate in RJ (Taylor & Bailey, 2022). Therefore, the first hypothesis can be defined as:

H1a: Family members (of victims) with a more positive attitude towards resocialization are more willing to participate in RJ.

H1b: Family members (of victims) with a more positive attitude towards RJ are more willing to participate in RJ.

Needs

Understanding these diverse attitudes within the community, especially those of victims' families, is crucial for developing more inclusive and effective restorative justice practices. This nuanced understanding ensures that RJ can cater to the diverse needs and perceptions of those affected by crimes, emphasizing the role of families in the process. It is shown that victims who experienced severe offenses compared to victims who experiences less severe crimes have at least one need: most often it is the need for emotional support throughout the justice process, especially by their parents (Ten Boom & Kuijpers, 2012). This support involves not only understanding the emotional complexities surrounding the crime, but also providing possibilities for expressing and processing these emotions in a safe and supportive environment (Stiller & Hellmann, 2017). Studies reveal that positive support from non-offending parents or caregivers following disclosure serves a crucial protective function for the mental health of victims during the aftermath of a crime. Surviving relatives of the victim of severe crimes, including sexual offenses, are also incorporated in these statistics. Therefore, the awareness of different needs within the primary and secondary victims is crucial for tailoring approaches that address the varied needs of individuals impacted by crimes. This leads to the second hypothesis:

H2: family members (of victims) with a higher need for emotional support are more willing to participate in RJ.

The need for emotional support is followed by the need for information. In the aftermath of a crime, victims commonly express a significant need for information. The need for information defines victims' need to receive more and detailed information about the offence or sharing impacts with the offender and also receiving an apology (Ten Boom & Kuijpers, 2012; Hansen & Umbreit, 2018). This need often stems from a sense of confusion regarding the events and a desire to gain insight into various aspects of the crime. Victims seeking information are driven by a wish to understand the specific details of the incident and

the motivations behind the offenders' actions. The ability to express their concerns and questions to the offender was an important motive for respondents to participate in the restorative intervention (Van Camp & Wemmers, 2013). Additionally, victims often express a curiosity about the character of the offender, desiring to comprehend the person responsible for the crime (Hansen & Umbreit, 2018). The need for information extends beyond the crime itself to encompass victims' aspirations to actively engage in the legal proceedings, seeking to be informed about the cases progress and desiring recognition of their needs throughout the entire process. Within the scope of this research, the need for information denotes victims wanting to receive detailed information about the offense, the motives and about the offender himself. This leads to the third hypothesis:

H3: family members (of victims) with a higher need for information are more willing to participate in RJC.

Building upon the foundation of understanding the broader public's perspectives on restorative justice and needs throughout the RJ process, it becomes imperative to extend this exploration to specific crime contexts, such as sexual offenses. This transition allows for an examination of how public perceptions and desires for involvement may vary when dealing with the sensitive and complex nature of sexual offenses.

Sexual offense

Sexual offending is an intricate and deeply sensitive issue within society, requiring a comprehensive approach that explores its roots and prioritizes the support of victims and their families (Lee et al., 2002). Various causes, including genetic predispositions, adverse developmental experiences, and contextual factors like intoxication, contribute to sexual crimes (Ward & Beech, 2006; Marshall & Barbaree, 1990). The integrated theory of sexual offending suggests that childhood adversities, especially violent parenting, play a pivotal role in fostering resentment and hostility, contributing to sexual offending (Marshall & Barbaree, 1990). Understanding the correlation between childhood adversities and sexual offending sheds light on the intricate interplay of family dynamics and the potential effect on both victims and their families. For example, adolescents exposed to abusive family dynamics face challenges in relationships and decision-making. Poor relationships between adolescents and parents emerge as high-risk factors for sexual recidivism (Naidoo & Sewpaul, 2014).

Controversial discussions persist as stakeholders engage in debates over the most effective strategies for preventing and rehabilitating sexual offenses (Lee et al, 2002). Conventional methods, such as registration, notification, and residence restrictions have

shown limited efficacy in preventing reoffending, often leading to stigmatization and isolation of offenders, without addressing the root causes of their behaviour. RJ emerges as a compelling alternative to traditional punitive measures, offering a more humane and integrative method for addressing the issues surrounding sexual offenses. McAlinden (2008) advocates for restorative practices in addressing sexual crimes, emphasizing its holistic and proactive response to the problem. The approach considers the unique challenges faced by families, as sexual offenses often affect not only the immediate victims but also their broader support networks. The urgency of adopting RJ in this context is underscored by alarming statistics. Fewer than five percent of sex offenders are ever apprehended, and those convicted often reveal the commission of additional undisclosed offences. Research further indicated that instances of reoffending may be concentrated within a small subset of sex offenders, particularly those who have not undergone treatment. With instances of reoffending when restorative measures are implemented, the humane reintegrative approach RJC offers to sex offender rehabilitation, presents a reduced chance of negative side effects compared to conventional measures. Comparing outcomes for young offenders dealt with by the court versus the conference process, it reveals a much higher prevalence of reoffending in court proceedings (66 percent) compared to conferences (48 percent). Sexual recidivism, specifically, is significantly reduced by more than 50 percent through restorative justice (McAlinden, 2008).

Public perception of sex offenders often leans towards misinformation and punitive attitudes. Studies by Levenson et al. (2007) reveal that the public is poorly informed about sex offenders, while Marsh and Wager (2015) found that community members often believe in high recidivism rates among sex offenders. Incorporating RJC into sexual offense cases can serve as an avenue to reshape these perceptions. Research consistently indicates positive attitudes towards RJC from survivors of sexual violence (Braithwaite et al., 2013).

The profound personal violation experienced in sexual offenses by the victim necessitates a comprehensive healing process. Restorative justice, with its emphasis on engagement and empowerment, aligns with the goals of supporting victims in a supportive environment (Benton-Greig, 2011). Rape and sexual assault are deeply personal violations that require the restoration of personal efficacy and control, a process facilitated by disclosing sexual offense. (Stiller & Hellmann, 2017). The study highlights the role of RJ in acknowledging the consequences of actions and fostering an environment where victims can articulate the effects of abuse constructively and with emotional support by their families. In light of the re-traumatizing nature of the criminal justice system, particularly in sexual offense

cases (Marsh & Wager, 2015), RJC emerges as a more compassionate alternative. By involving families, RJC has the potential to validate victims' experiences and provide assurances that they are not to blame. Concerns about re-traumatization have been addressed, with survivors often reporting empowerment through conferencing (Naidoo & Sewpaul, 2014). Especially in cases of sexual offenses, the RJ process played a crucial role in empowering the victim and marked a pivotal moment in the healing journey. Another study observed that, in comparison to traditional criminal legal proceedings, restorative processes are less detrimental to survivors, fostering a less victimizing experience (Sardina & Ackerman, 2022).

In conclusion, incorporating RJC into the response to sexual offenses offers a promising avenue for addressing the multifaceted challenges posed by these crimes. By reshaping public attitudes, providing a compassionate alternative to the re-traumatizing criminal justice system, and emphasizing empowerment and healing, RJC stands as a holistic approach to support both victims and their families in the aftermath of sexual offenses. Recognizing and respecting the diverse needs and preferences of victims within the framework of RJ is not only an acknowledgment of the integral role families play but also a step forward fostering a more compassionate, informed, and inclusive approach to addressing sexual offenses within our society.

Methods

Participants

This study comprised a sample of 76 participants, from which data of 52 participants was used. Ethical approval by the ethical committee of the BMS of the University of Twente was obtained before recruiting the participants. Participants were recruited via the SONA system and through convenience sampling of sharing links on social media. The Sona system is a test subject pool of the BMS faculty in which students can gain credits as a reward for participation in a study. On the Sona platform, the participants accessed a short description of the study and then decided whether to participate for 0.25 credits. The participation was voluntary, and the only requirements were that the participants had sufficient English skills and were at least 18 years old. Each participant signed an informed consent. Reasons for the exclusion of data were the disagreement to the consent form and not filling out the questionnaire completely and properly. Four of the participants did not sign the informed consent and 20 did not fill out the questionnaire completely.

Participants age ranged from 18 to 60 ($M = 19.1$; $SD = 26.3$) while 53.8% ($N = 28$) of the participants were female and 46.2% ($N = 24$) were male. 73.1% ($N = 38$) of the participants indicated that their nationality is German, 11.5% ($N = 6$) of them were Dutch and 15.4% ($N = 8$) stated that they have another nationality. Additionally, 3.8% ($N = 2$) of the participants had less than a high school degree, 59.6% ($N = 31$) absolved a high school degree, 25% ($N = 13$) had a Bachelor's degree and 11.5% ($N = 6$) were awarded a master degree.

Design

A cross sectional research design was used to measure the relationship between the independent variables “informational needs”, “emotional needs”, “attitude towards resocialization”, “attitude towards RJ” and the dependent variable “willingness to participate in restorative justice conferencing”.

Materials

The main material used for the research was an online survey which was created with the software Qualtrics. The questionnaire contained an informed consent (Appendix A) and a crime scenario (Appendix B). Additionally, the questionnaire consisted of six scales and 35 items in total. One open question was asked at the end. The questionnaire took 20 minutes to complete. The survey was analysed with the software IBM SPSS Statistics and ATLAS.ti 22.

Crime scenario

All participants read a scenario in which they were asked to take the role of an acquaintance of the victim, defined as daughter or sister, who became victim of a sexual offense at her own party. The present crime scenario draws inspiration from a case discussed in the work of Sardina and Ackerman (2022), presenting a narrative from a victim that exhibits relevant similarities to the current portrayal.

“Maya is a 17-year-old girl, focusing on her school performance and enjoying her teenage years. She was left home alone for the weekend. Her idea was to throw a party at her parent's house and inviting some friends over. Leo was one of them. He is already 22 years old. He had to redo some classes, but now he is in his last year of high school. Maya's best friend, Alice came over earlier to help with the organisation of the party. They went to the shop and bought some alcohol. The party started and everyone was there. They drank a lot of alcohol; everyone was having fun. Leo came to Maya and talked to her about how beautiful and special she was.

He told her that he wants to talk to her in a quieter room. They went into her room and talked. Suddenly, Leo started to touch Maya. She was very uncomfortable. He told her that she is a very special girl and that he wants to sleep with her. She already drank some wine, but she told him that she does not want to sleep with him. He was upset and continued to touch her. She tried to go away, but he held her. The music was too loud to scream for help, her body was too weak to protect herself. She did not do anything, because she was shocked. After the offense, Leo left the room and continued to party. Maya was left alone sobbing in the room, not realising what has happened. After one hour; Alice found her sobbing on the floor. She could not talk, she only stared at the wall. You arrived the next day and found Maya and Alice on the floor of her bedroom. Maya started to talk about the offense and was brought to the hospital, where the crime was also reported to the police. Leo was arrested after the report, he told the police that he was very drunk and did not realize that Maya was not willing to sleep with him.“

Explanation of RJ

Participants were introduced to the principles of restorative justice (RJ) emphasizing its objective of facilitating reparative measures rather than exclusive punitive to ensure that participants have a clear understanding of the principles and objectives of restorative justice. Specifically, RJC was explicated as a form of RJ, and participants were extended an invitation to actively participate in this process:

“After the police file has been processed, a judge is assigned to the case. Considering the emotional impact, the sexual offense might have caused for the victim and the offender; the judge thought that it might be a good idea for the direct involved parties to have mediated contact and talk about what happened and why. Mediated contact is an example of restorative justice. Restorative Justice is an alternative approach to dealing with crime. It offers the opportunity to repair harm, promote accountability and fostering healing among the parties involved, instead of focusing on punishing the offender. It gives the offense back to the originate parties: the victim, the offender and the community. An example of this is restorative justice conferencing (RJC). In conferencing the direct involved parties of a crime come together and have a facilitated dialogue about the offense, its impact, and solutions to repair harm. It is a voluntary process. Both Leo and Maya would like to participate in RJC. As a direct acquaintance of the victim, you are also invited to participate in RJC.”

Independent variables

All variables were measured with a seven-point Likert scale which ranged from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (7). After obtaining the dataset, the researcher computed Cronbach's alpha for each scale to evaluate the internal consistency of the measures.

Attitude towards resocialization

To assess whether the participants had a positive or negative attitude towards resocialization, the items of the scale by Bonensteffen (2018) were used. The scale consisted of seven items ($\alpha = .85$). Five items required reversal due to their negative phrasing, necessitating recoding for proper analysis to ensure alignment with the intended meaning and maintain consistency in the directionality of scales. A factor analysis showed that all items measured one factor with an eigenvalue higher than one. Participants had to agree or disagree with statements like “The most effective and human approach to fight crime is done through resocialization.” and “Resocialization programs are a waste of time and money.”.

Attitude towards restorative justice

To measure the attitude of the participants towards RJ, the items of the scale by Okimoto et al. (2012) were used. This scale consisted of six items ($\alpha = .79$). A factor analysis showed that all items measured one factor with an eigenvalue higher than one. Participants were asked to indicate to which extent they agree with statements like “A sense of justice requires that the offender and the victim develop a shared understanding of the harm done by an incident.” and “Without an offender’s sincere acknowledgement of having acted inappropriately, the injustice is not completely restored.”

Need for information

The need for information of the acquaintances was measured with six items ($\alpha = .86$). A factor analysis revealed that all items assessed one factor with eigenvalues exceeding one. Participants were asked to imply to which extent they agree with statements like “I want to know why the offender committed the offense.” and “I want to know how the crime has affected the offender.”.

Need for emotional support

The need for emotional support was measured with eight items ($\alpha = .79$). All items, as revealed by factor analysis, demonstrated to have high factor loadings on one factor with an eigenvalue exceeding one, affirming their significance in measuring the scale. Participants were asked to

indicate to what extent they agree with statements like “I want to see the offender apologizing to the victim.” and “I want the offender to understand the consequences of the crime.”.

Dependent variable

Willingness to participate in RJC

The willingness to participate in RJ practices was assessed with three items ($\alpha = .88$), one direct question and an open question. The participants were asked to indicate to what extent they would participate in RJC with questions like “To what extent are you willing to participate in conferencing?” and “To what extent are you willing to talk to the offender?”. Additionally, the participants were asked directly if they would participate in conferencing as an acquaintance of the victim with the options yes or no. The open question assessed the most important reason for the respondents to participate in RJC. This question holds significant potential as a starting point for future research. By exploring whether certain needs are overlooked in the respondents' motivations to participate in RJC, this inquiry not only delves into current perspectives but also lays the groundwork for uncovering new insights that could shape the direction of future studies in this field.

Control variables

To control whether experiences with sexual offenses influence the willingness to participate in RJC, two questions were asked: “Do you know someone who has ever become a victim of a sexual offense?” and “Have you ever been a victim of a sexual offense?” Knowing whether respondents have personal connections to individuals who have been victims of sexual offenses allows researchers to explore the indirect impact of these experiences. It may help in gauging empathy, emotional involvement, and potential motivations for participating in RJC, which can be valuable for tailoring intervention strategies. Additionally, individuals who have been victims of sexual offenses may have unique concerns, fears, or reservations about participating in RJC. These characteristics might impact their willingness and the outcomes of the study.

Additionally, to control if participants could imagine themselves in the role of the acquaintances, one question was asked whether they imagined the victim to be their sister or their daughter. Additionally, five items ($\alpha = .82$) were used like “I could imagine myself in the role of a family member of the victim.” and “It was difficult for me to imagine being the related person.” One item needed to be reversed due to its negative phrasing, to ensure consistency in the directionality of scales.

Procedure

Participants were recruited either via social media or the Sona system. When people participated via a link provided on a social media platform, they were redirected to the Qualtrics questionnaire. Each respondent was informed that the study would take approximately 20 minutes to complete and that it is a voluntary process from which one can withdraw at any time. Also, the participants were informed that there will be a crime scenario including scenes and talking about sexual offenses. After participants agreed with the informed consent, the demographic questions appeared. Participants were asked to indicate their age, gender, nationality, and their highest level of education. If the participants did not agree with the informed consent, they were immediately directed to the end of the survey. Following the demographics, two control questions were asked to check whether knowing someone who experienced sexual offense or being a victim themselves. After the control question, measurements towards the attitude of the public took place. The focus of these measurement was the attitude towards resocialization and the attitude towards restorative justice. In the next step, participants were introduced to the crime scenario in which they were asked to imagine being in the role of an acquaintance of the victim who experienced sexual offense. The participants had to read the crime scenario and indicated afterwards if they imagined the victim to be their daughter or their sister. Additionally, a manipulation check took place in which participants were asked about the authenticity of the crime scenario and whether they could identify as the acquaintance of the victim. Next, the different needs, namely informational needs and emotional needs were measured. The participants had to imply to which extent they agree with provided statement about the different needs. Then, the participants received an explanation of RJ and RJC. Questions about their willingness to participate in it and their most important need for participation were asked. Finally, the participants received a quick debriefing about the purpose of the study and the contact details of the researchers.

Results

Mean and standard deviation of all variables were depicted by descriptive statistics. Attitude towards Resocialisation had a mean score of 4.73 ($SD = 1,1$) while the attitude towards RJ had a mean score of 4.71 ($SD = 1.01$), suggesting a moderate level of positivity towards both "Resocialization" and "Restorative Justice". These values offer insights into the central tendency and variability of the attitudes expressed by the participants. Moreover, the need for

information showed a mean score of 5.02 ($SD = 1.35$), indicating a moderate to high need for information, while the need for emotional support had a mean score of 4.84 ($SD = 1.17$), implying a moderate need for emotional support. These values offer insights into the average level and variability of participants needs. Finally, the last scale considering the willingness to participate had a mean score of 4.96 ($SD = 1.42$), signifying respondents demonstrated a moderate to high level of willingness to participate.

Table 1:

Descriptive Statistics

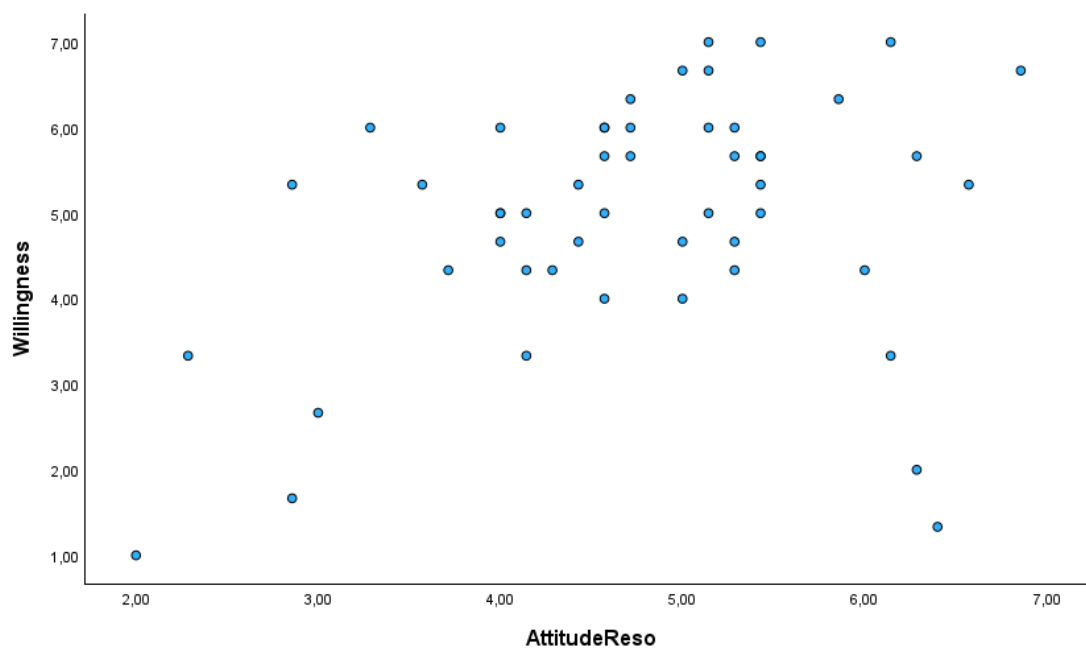
	<i>N</i>	Mean	SD
Attitude Resocialisation	52	4.275	1.09050
Attitude RJ	52	4.7115	1.00766
Informational Needs	52	5.0224	1.34635
Emotional Needs	52	4.8486	1.16850
Willingness to Participate	51	4.9673	1.42868

The sign of the correlation coefficient (r) indicates the direction of the relationship, which could either be positive or negative. The magnitude of the correlation coefficient (closer to 1 or -1) indicated the strength of the relationship. Statistical significance is also crucial for the analysis. The p-values have to be below the predetermined significance level of 0.05 to consider the correlations statistically significant. Assessing both the correlation coefficient and statistical significance plays a pivotal role in data analysis, providing valuable insights into the strength and reliability of relationships between variables. This comprehensive evaluation allows researchers to gauge the direction of the data and make informed decisions regarding the support or rejection of hypotheses based on established criteria.

Attitude towards resocialization had a positive significant correlation coefficient with the willingness to participate in RJC ($r = 0.322$, $p = 0.021$). This suggests that as attitudes towards resocialization become more positive, there is a corresponding increase in the willingness to engage in RJC.

Figure 1

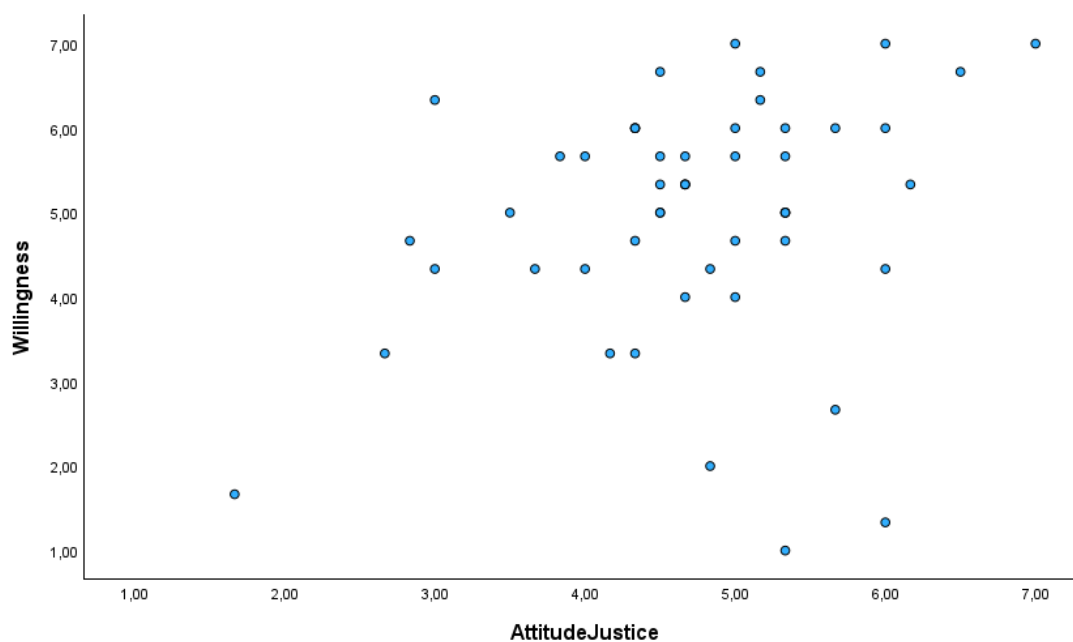
Correlation between Attitude towards Resocialisation and Willingness to Participate in RJC



In contrast, the attitude towards RJ had a positive statistically non-significant correlation with the willingness to participate in RJC ($r = 0.251$, $p = 0.08$). While there is a positive association, it is not strong enough to be considered statistically significant at the conventional significance level of 0.05.

Figure 2

Correlation between Attitude towards RJ and Willingness to Participate in RJC



Coming to the needs of the public, informational needs showed a positive significant correlation with the willingness to participate in RJC ($r = 0.361, p = 0.009$) while emotional needs also showed a positive statistically significant correlation with the willingness to participate in RJC ($r = 0.376, p = 0.007$). These findings suggest that as informational and emotional needs of the public increase, there is a corresponding increase in the willingness to participate in RJC.

Figure 3

Correlation between Informational Needs and Willingness to Participate in RJC

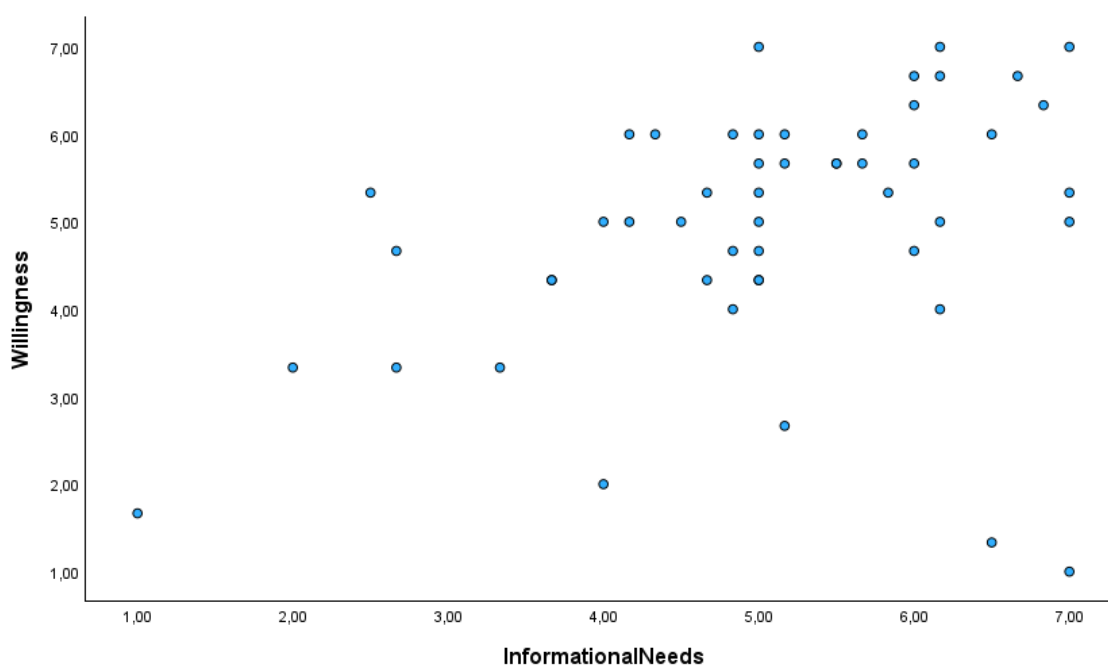
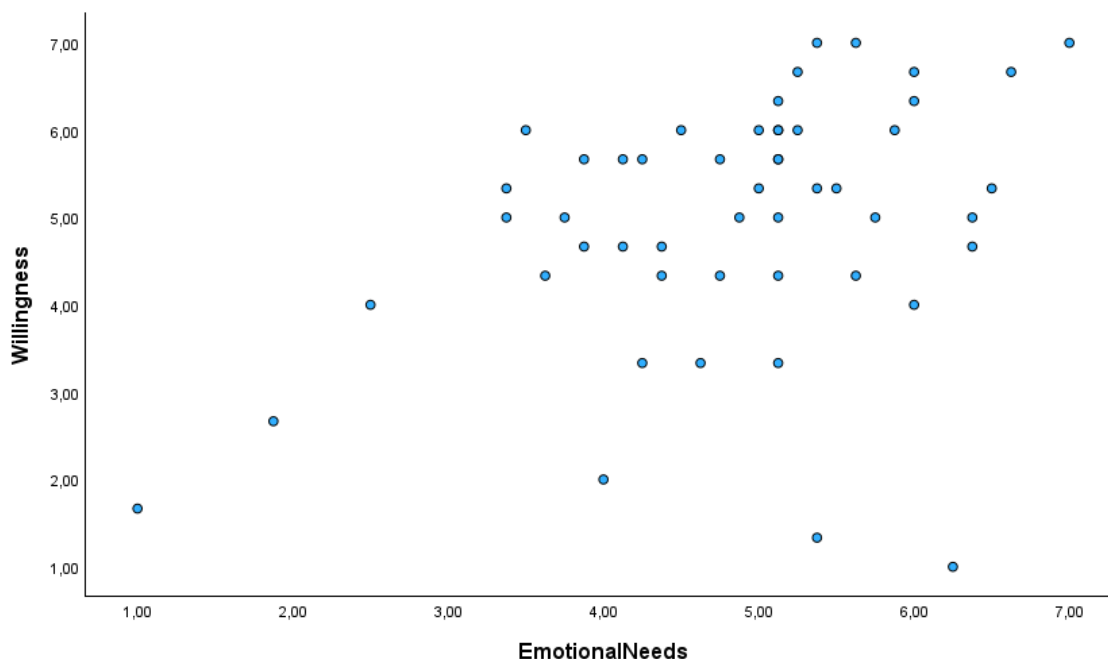


Figure 4

Correlation between Emotional Needs and Willingness to Participate in RJ

**Table 2:**

Correlations between Independent and Dependent Variable

Variables	Variables				Willingness
	Attitude Resocialization	Attitude RJ	Informational Needs	Emotional Needs	
Attitude Resocialization	1	,236	,358**	,254	,322*
Attitude RJ		1	,554**	,375**	,251
Informational Needs			1	,420**	,361**
Emotional Needs				1	,376**
Willingness					1

*Note. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$. All items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale. $N = 52$, Pearson-Correlation Coefficient*

In summary, the results highlight the influence of attitudes and the public's informational and emotional needs on the willingness to participate in RJC. Particularly, positive attitudes towards resocialization emerge as a significant motivating factor, exerting an impact on the inclination to engage in RJC. Simultaneously, the study underlines the roles played by the informational and emotional needs of the public in fostering participation in RJC. These insights collectively emphasize the interplay of factors that shape individuals' willingness to be involved in RJC.

Hypothesis testing

H1a: Family members (of victims) with a more positive attitude towards resocialization are more willing to participate in RJC.

It was predicted that a positive attitude towards RJ predicts the family members willingness to participate in RJC. A linear regression analysis was conducted to investigate the relationship between attitude towards resocialization and the public's willingness to participate in the restorative justice process. The overall model was statistically significant, explaining 10% of the variance in the willingness to participate ($R^2 = .10$, $F(1, 49) = 5.67$, $p = .02$). Specifically, within this model, a positive attitude towards resocialization significantly influenced the public's willingness to engage in the restorative justice process ($B = .43$, $SE = .18$, $t = 2.38$, $p = .02$). These findings suggest that individuals with a more positive attitude towards resocialization are more likely to express a willingness to participate in restorative justice. This hypothesis is thus supported.

H1b: Family members (of victims) with a more positive attitude towards RJ are more willing to participate in RJC.

Additionally, it was predicted that a positive attitude towards RJ predicts the family members willingness to participate in RJC. A linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the extent to which attitude towards restorative justice predicts the public's willingness to participate in the restorative justice process. The regression model was statistically non-significant, indicating that attitude towards restorative justice did not significantly predict willingness to participate ($B = .355$, $SE = .19$, $t = 1.82$, $p = .07$). The model explained a small proportion of the variance in willingness to participate, with an R^2 of .06. The overall significance of the model, as assessed by the F-statistic, was not statistically significant ($F(1,$

49) = 3.29, $p = .07$). These results suggest that, in this sample, attitude towards restorative justice may not be a significant predictor of the public's willingness to engage in the restorative justice process. Therefore, the hypothesis that a positive attitude towards RJ predicts the willingness to participate in RJC is rejected.

H2: family members of victims with a higher need for emotional support are more willing to participate in RJC.

To investigate whether family members of victims with a higher need for emotional support are more willing to participate in RJC, a linear regression analysis was conducted. The analysis revealed a statistically significant positive correlation between emotional needs and willingness to participate in RJC ($B = .46$, $SE = .16$, $t = 2.84$, $p = 0.007$). The adjusted R^2 for the model was .14, indicating that emotional needs accounted for 14% of the variance in the willingness to participate in RJC. This result supports H2, suggesting that family members with a higher need for emotional support are indeed more willing to engage in RJC ($F(1, 49) = 8.06$, $p = 0.007$). Given these findings, H2 can be accepted.

H3: family members of victims with a higher need for information are more willing to participate in RJC.

To explore whether family members of victims with a higher need for information are more willing to participate in RJC, a linear regression analysis was conducted. It was expected that people with a higher need for information are more willing to participate in RJC. The analysis revealed a statistically significant positive relation between informational needs and willingness to participate in RJC ($B = .38$, $SE = .14$, $t = 2.70$, $p = 0.009$). The adjusted R^2 for the model was .13, indicating that informational needs accounted for 13% of the variance in the willingness to participate in RJC. This result supports H3, suggesting that family members with a higher need for information are indeed more willing to engage in RJC ($F(1, 49) = 7.32$, $p = 0.009$). Given these findings, H3 can be accepted.

Qualitative Outcome

In the assessment of the willingness to engage in RJC, participants were asked about their potential participation as acquaintances. Results demonstrated that 42 respondents (80.8%) affirmed their willingness to participate, while 10 individuals (19.2%) expressed a negative inclination, indicating a reluctance to engage in the process.

Furthermore, participants were probed regarding their most significant reason influencing their choice to participate or abstain from RJC. Of the respondents, 24 offered insights into the reasons compelling them to consider participation, while 9 specified reasons for their decision not to participate in the process. These reasons were coded into three overall categories, namely Support and Emotional Connection, Belief in Justice and Empathy, and Concerns and Scepticism. The coding was done with the software ATLAS.ti. Every reason the participants indicated at the end of the survey was analysed and sorted into a category.

Support and Emotional connections for the victim was mentioned several times as a reason for participation in RJ. It includes reasons like “I would like to participate to show my support to the victim”, “to help the victim deal with the offense” or “to speak up for her if needed”. Belief in Justice was another reason participants mentioned as a main theme in the survey. It comprised reasons like “It would help all parties involved”, “it is important to listen to everyone’s point of view” and “new chances and hope”. Lastly, concern and scepticism are reasons participants mentioned not to participate in RJ. It was about “I believe that the offenders mind will not be changed by RJC.”, “fear of re-traumatization” and “the crime is none of my business unless the victim requests my presence”.

This categorization allows for a clearer understanding of the reasons provided by participants, making it easier to identify common patterns and themes. This grouping provides a more cohesive understanding of the participants reasons for (not) participating in RJC, revealing some common motivations and concerns.

Additional results

A regression analysis has been conducted to test whether knowing someone who experienced sexual offense or being a victim of sexual offense themselves, influences the willingness to participate in RJC. The outcome suggested that the experience of knowing someone who has been a victim of sexual offense ($B = -.37, SE = .33, t = -1.1, p = 0.28$) and personal victimization ($B = .27, SE = .35, t = .77, p = .45$) do not significantly predict willingness to participate in RJC. Based on this analysis, neither knowing someone who has been a victim of a sexual offense nor being a victim oneself significantly influences the willingness to participate in RJC.

Furthermore, the correlation analysis among the independent variables reveals noteworthy relationships (Table 2). Specifically, a moderate positive and significant correlation is observed between attitude towards resocialization and informational needs ($r = 0.358, p = 0.009$), as well as between Informational Needs and Emotional Needs ($r = 0.420, p$

= 0.002). These findings underscore the interconnections among attitudes, informational and emotional needs.

Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate public attitudes towards RJ, specifically focusing on RJC, and to understand the motivations behind public involvement in the process. With a particular emphasis on families of victims, the research seeks to explore the nuances of attitudes, identify emotional support and informational needs, assess factors contributing to the willingness to participate in RJC, and address existing gaps in understanding the perspectives and requirements of families in RJC. The ultimate goal is to contribute valuable insights that can inform more inclusive and effective restorative justice practices, fostering a better understanding of public dynamics in the aftermath of criminal offenses. The research question was formulated as *“To what extent do family members of victims want to be involved in restorative justice conferencing and why?”*

Implications

Attitude and Willingness to participate

The initial hypothesis suggested that people with a positive attitude toward Resocialization and RJ would be more willing to participate in RJ practices. The results partially supported this, showing that individuals with a positive attitude toward resocialization were significantly more willing to engage in the restorative justice process. The results emphasize the complexity of factors influencing individuals' willingness to participate in RJ by highlighting that additional factors or nuances beyond a positive attitude toward resocialization play a role in shaping this willingness. The positive influence of attitudes toward resocialization aligns with the broader significance of rehabilitation-oriented perspectives in fostering engagement (McAlinden, 2008). In other words, when individuals hold positive views or attitudes regarding the process of resocialization, it complements and supports the more extensive value of rehabilitation-oriented approaches in encouraging active participation or involvement. The findings highlight the important role of attitudes toward resocialization being a predictor for engagement in restorative justice. This aligns with earlier research indicating that individuals with positive views on resocialization are more likely to participate in RJ (Taylor & Bailey, 2022).

However, while there appears to be a tendency for individuals with positive attitudes toward RJ to also express greater willingness to participate, the observed relationship may have occurred due to chance or random variability in the data. The findings do not provide strong enough evidence to confidently assert this relation in the studied sample. This contrasts with previous research suggesting a strong link between a positive attitude toward RJ and willingness to participate (Taylor & Bailey, 2022). Additionally, previous findings indicate that both families and survivors of sexual violence express positive attitudes towards the use of RJ in these cases (Marsh & Wager, 2015), as individuals who hold positive views typically believe in the effectiveness and value of the process. In this specific sample, the study suggests that even though attitude toward RJ may be positive, it may not be a definitive predictor of willingness to participate. The inconclusive nature of the correlation between a positive attitude toward RJ and willingness to participate signals the importance of ongoing research to refine understanding of the interplay between attitudes and participation in restorative justice processes.

Within the examined sample, notable variations in perspectives on resocialization and restorative justice (RJ) were observed. It became evident that individuals within this group held diverse opinions when it came to the concepts of resocialization and the principles of restorative justice. The inclusion of both positive and negative attitudes indicates a range of sentiments toward the concepts of resocialization and the principles of restorative justice. This adds nuance to the understanding of the participants' perspectives, indicating that opinions within the group not only differ but encompass a diversity that includes both favorable and unfavorable views. These differences in opinion may stem from various factors such as personal experiences, cultural backgrounds, or varying levels of exposure to information related to resocialization and RJ (Taylor & Bailey, 2022). The research by Roberts and Stalans (2004) suggest that a lack of familiarity may impede public attitude towards RJ. Additionally, there is a positive relationship between the seriousness of a crime and the severity of punishment posed by the public. For serious crimes, including rape, the support for RJ declined. Another reason which might influence the attitude of the public, is that people tend to seek explanation for inappropriate behaviour. If it is believed that the crime was caused by internal factors, the public tend to support more severe punishment. However, if it was caused by external factors, the public tend to value restorative processes (Roberts & Stalans, 2004). The existence of divergent viewpoints within the sample suggests a nuanced and multifaceted understanding of these concepts among the participants emphasizing the need for an analysis that considers the diverse perspectives present in the studied population.

Emotional needs

The hypothesis examined the link between family members' inclination to participate in RJC and their perceived need for emotional support. The results confirmed this hypothesis. In simpler terms, family members with a heightened need for emotional support indeed display a greater willingness to participate in RJC, aligning with prior research highlighting the distinct needs of victims, particularly those of severe offenses (Ten Boom & Kuijpers, 2012). Existing literature consistently underscores the pivotal role of emotional support in the aftermath of crimes. This involves grasping the complex emotional dynamics post-incident and providing secure environments for expression and processing, especially within familial contexts (Ten Boom & Kuijpers, 2012; Stiller & Hellmann, 2017). Thus, it appears that family members, being more indirect victims, share a similar need, and RJC might be a potential avenue to fulfill this shared need. Studies further accentuate the protective function of positive support from non-offending parents or caregivers, extending to surviving relatives, particularly in severe crimes such as sexual offenses.

The research underscores the importance of recognizing and addressing the shared emotional needs of family members, which can be seen as secondary victims, especially in cases involving severe crimes. This understanding is paramount for the effective implementation of restorative justice practices.

Informational needs

Additionally, this investigation substantiates the hypothesis that family members demonstrating a pronounced need for information exhibit a greater willingness to participate in RJC. This affirmation aligns with existing research on post-crime experiences. Victims consistently articulate a compelling demand for information, seeking a comprehensive understanding of the offense, an avenue to share impacts with the offender, and the reception of an apology (Ten Boom & Kuijpers, 2012; Hansen & Umbreit, 2018). Their quest for information may stem from a desire to comprehend specific details of the incident, including the motivations behind the offender's actions. Crucially, active participation in restorative interventions often emanates from the motive of expressing concerns and questions to the (surrogate) offender (Van Camp & Wemmers, 2013). Moreover, victims' express curiosity about the character of the offender, revealing a desire to understand the person responsible for the crime (Hansen & Umbreit, 2018). Beyond the crime itself, the identified need for information extends to victims' active engagement in legal proceedings. This involves seeking information about the case's progress and desiring acknowledgment of their needs throughout

the entire process. In this research context, the identified need for information encompasses a yearning for detailed insights into the offense, the motives, and information about the offender himself.

These findings underscore the critical role of recognizing and addressing the informational needs of family members, who can be considered secondary victims, particularly in cases involving sexual offenses. Acknowledging and meeting these informational needs are vital components for providing effective support and fostering engagement within the restorative justice process. This need experienced by family members establishes a valid basis for the application of RJC in these cases.

Sexual offenses

In the context of sexual offenses, the implications for RJC are profound. The findings emphasize the need for a highly sensitive and victim-centered approach, recognizing the emotional trauma, legal considerations, and community perceptions associated with such crimes. Public views on RJC in cases of sexual offenses may diverge from perceptions of other crimes due to the heightened sensitivity and severity associated with such offenses (Roberts & Stalans, 2004). The public's choice of punishment severity was influenced by the gravity of the committed crime. The general preference was for imprisonment in cases of violent and sex offenses, as opposed to non-violent instances (e.g. theft) (Wood & Viki, 2001). Additionally, public perception of sex offenders often leans towards misinformation and punitive attitudes (Levenson et al., 2007). The societal stigma, safety concerns, and unique challenges surrounding sexual crimes can influence public attitudes. Ensuring victim empowerment, addressing safety apprehensions, and implementing effective educational initiatives become crucial factors in shaping positive public views on the application of restorative justice principles in the context of sexual offenses compared to other types of crimes. Tailoring communication strategies, providing comprehensive support services, and implementing educational initiatives become crucial for fostering inclusivity and understanding. Continuous research is imperative to refine and enhance the effectiveness of RJC in addressing the complexities associated with sexual offenses.

Reasons for (non-)participation

The qualitative analysis of participants' motivations for engaging in RJC holds significant importance as it unravels unexpected reasons that influence their decisions. The examination has revealed three overarching themes: the need for support and emotional connection with

the victim, a belief in justice and empathy, and concerns and scepticism. These themes provide insights into the decision-making processes guiding participants in their involvement or non-involvement in RJC. Understanding these motivations not only enriches our comprehension of the factors influencing individuals' choices within the restorative justice framework but also lays a foundation for future research to explore and refine interventions that cater to diverse motivations.

Support and Emotional Connection. A recurring motive among participants is their desire to offer emotional support to victims. This means that these individuals are motivated to play a supportive role, extending care and empathy to those who have been impacted by offenses. The subsequent observation that family members with a heightened inclination to offer emotional support are more likely to participate in RJC suggests that within the sample, there is a distinct subgroup of individuals (the family members) who not only themselves require emotional support but also demonstrate a proactive willingness to provide support to others. Notably, these findings align with previous research indicating that family members are often recognized as secondary victims (Ward & Brown, 2004) and that they may feel equally harmed by the offence (Marsh & Wager, 2015). Additionally, the findings support that families serve as a critical social support system for the victims and are willing to offer help (Stiller & Hellmann, 2017). This alignment highlights the role of emotional connection as a motivator, emphasizing its significance in influencing individuals to actively engage in the restorative justice process. In response, the implications include the need for enhanced emotional support services within the RJC framework, recognizing the shared responsibility identified among participants.

Moving forward, there's potential for building collective responsibility within communities, fostering collaborative approaches to address the aftermath of crimes. Moreover, family-centric approaches in designing and implementing restorative justice practices may be instrumental, acknowledging and accommodating the unique emotional needs of family members throughout the process. For future considerations, exploring the long-term impact of emotional support in RJC and developing community-specific engagement strategies could further refine and optimize restorative justice practices. Additionally, further research is essential to explore the dynamics and implications surrounding the provision of emotional support within the context of restorative justice. In essence, these findings shed light on the role of emotional connection, providing valuable insights for tailoring support services and fostering collaborative and family-centered approaches in the realm of RJ.

Belief in Justice and Empathy. Another theme which was unveiled by the qualitative analysis, examining the most important need for participation in RJC, was the belief in Justice coupled with a capacity for empathy. Participants expressed a commitment to the notion that RJ can positively contribute to the healing process, reflecting a societal endorsement of its principles and the potential for fostering understanding and reconciliation. These findings are also in line with previous research indicating that RJC fosters healing and helps all parties involved (Rossner, 2008; Hayes, 2005).

However, as findings of this research indicate that while participants readily embrace the idea of resocialization, the hypothesis related to their attitudes toward specific RJ principles was rejected. This might signal a selective embrace of certain RJ principles while scepticism toward others. The rejection of the hypothesis regarding attitudes toward specific RJ principles emphasizes the need for targeted communication strategies. Understanding and addressing the specific concerns or uncertainties participants hold will be pivotal for fostering complete endorsement of RJ principles.

Future research could delve deeper into participants' specific concerns or reservations related to RJ principles. This understanding may inform tailored interventions to enhance acceptance. Moreover, a comparative analysis of participants with varying levels of belief in RJ principles could offer insights into the factors influencing attitudes. This comparative approach allows for more targeted interventions and communication strategies.

Concerns and Scepticism. The final theme identified in the qualitative analysis can be characterized as scepticism. While participants express a genuine desire for emotional support and maintain a belief in justice, some harbor scepticism, particularly regarding the effectiveness of RJC. These doubts may emanate from uncertainties surrounding the process's efficacy or concerns about potential challenges in achieving meaningful outcomes, which is also in line with previous research, which suggests that the public is poorly informed about the RJ process (Levenson et al., 2007). Additionally, negative attitudes may stem from doubts about the process's effectiveness (Taylor & Bailey, 2022). Recognizing these reservations, there is a crucial need to tailor information dissemination strategies. Addressing concerns about the effectiveness of RJC and providing clear, transparent information can contribute to alleviating scepticism and fostering a more positive perception among participants. The identified reservations underscore the importance of enhancing transparency in the RJC process. Openly addressing potential challenges, limitations, and the realistic outcomes of the process can contribute to building trust and mitigating scepticism.

Additionally, future research endeavors could delve deeper into the specific concerns participants held regarding the efficacy of RJC. Understanding the nature of these reservations will provide actionable insights for refining and optimizing the restorative justice process. Investigating the long-term impact of participants' reservations could offer insights into whether initial concerns evolve over time and how they may influence the overall success of the RJ approach. Conducting a comparative analysis between cases where participants overcame reservations and experienced successful RJC outcomes versus cases where scepticism persisted could offer insights on factors contributing to positive engagement and dispute resolution.

Additional results and considerations

The study delved into the potential influence of personal experiences with sexual offenses or victimization on individuals' willingness to participate in RJ. By directly asking about personal experiences, researchers can identify potential barriers that might hinder participation. Surprisingly, the analysis of this research indicated that experience did not impact individuals' willingness to participate in RJ. This outcome also aligns with a study by Wood and Viki (2001) which observed that personal victimization experiences often do not consistently correlate with increased punitive attitudes to crime and punishment.

This has several implications, underscoring the multifaceted nature of decision-making in this context. The study signals that there is a genuine need for participation and that factors beyond personal experiences play a more influential role in shaping willingness to participate in RJ. Identifying these factors might be for understanding and addressing the decision-making processes. Policymakers and practitioners should recognize that the willingness to participate in RJ is influenced by a variety of factors. Relying solely on personal experiences may overlook crucial aspects. A comprehensive understanding is necessary for effective restorative justice program design. Tailoring initiatives to address a broader array of influencing factors can encourage broader community engagement.

Certainly, the identified correlations among the independent variables, indicating potential multicollinearity, can inform the design of future research. Researchers should consider exploring these relationships more deeply, possibly using advanced statistical techniques.

Limitations and Future directions

One notable limitation is the relatively small sample size used in this study. The restricted number of participants may compromise the generalizability of the findings. This limitation introduces the risk of sampling bias, as the participants may not adequately represent the diversity of perspectives within the target population. Additionally, the reduced statistical power associated with a small sample size limits the study's ability to detect true effects or relationships between variables. In essence, the small sample size poses difficulties in drawing conclusive and statistically significant results. However, even though the sample size was relatively small, this research found results that were comparable to previous research. To address these limitations, future research should prioritize larger and more representative samples. This strategic approach will enhance the reliability and generalizability of the findings, enabling more confident conclusions regarding the factors influencing individuals' willingness to participate in RJ processes.

Another limitation arises from the study's reliance on hypothetical scenarios to gauge participants' responses. Real-life situations may elicit different emotional reactions, and the use of hypothetical scenarios might not fully capture the complexities and nuances of actual decision-making, limiting the external validity of the findings. This limitation could result in an oversimplified understanding of participants' attitudes and behaviors in emotionally charged scenarios. Additionally, the reliance on hypothetical scenarios may lead to potential social desirability bias, where participants provide responses, they perceive as socially acceptable rather than expressing their genuine attitudes. This bias can distort the data, as participants may be influenced by a desire to present themselves favorably. To address these limitations, future research should consider incorporating real-life case studies or observational studies. This methodological shift would allow for a more accurate representation of participants' attitudes and behaviors in genuine RJ contexts, providing data that aligns more closely with the complexities of actual decision-making processes.

The potential lack of diversity in the sample is also a notable limitation, which may impede the applicability of the findings across different demographic groups and cultural contexts. Most of the participants were German, excluding other nationalities in the analysis. This limitation raises concerns about the generalizability of the study's conclusions, given the argument that public perspectives on crime and justice are partially influenced by socio-economic dynamics (Wood & Viki, 2001). If the sample predominantly represents a specific demographic or cultural group, the findings may not accurately reflect the attitudes and responses of a more diverse population. Additionally, a society in a good economic condition

the public sentiment often leans towards greater sympathy for the offender (Wood & Viki, 2001). Consequently, the study may overlook variations in perspectives and attitudes toward RJ based on demographic factors. To address this limitation, future research should actively strive for a more diverse participant pool, including more nationalities and age groups. Intentional inclusion of individuals from various demographic and cultural backgrounds will enhance the study's external validity. Analysing variations in attitudes based on specific demographic factors and adopting a culturally sensitive approach will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing willingness to engage in RJ across diverse populations.

Finally, a limitation of the study lies in the potential oversight of crucial variables influencing the willingness to participate, which could affect the overall comprehensiveness and accuracy of the findings. While the research has identified some relevant variables, additional investigations are necessary to delve deeper into the myriad factors shaping individuals' willingness to engage in RJC.

Conclusion

This research on public attitudes towards RJC unfolds insights into factors influencing willingness to participate. It contributes valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of decision-making, fostering a deeper understanding of public dynamics in the aftermath of criminal offenses. The study highlights the predictive value of attitudes, emotional and informational needs, and motivations for engagement. Based on the outcomes, the research question is answered, emphasizing the need for targeted strategies that foster positive attitudes, address emotional and informational needs, and acknowledge diverse perspectives to enhance public involvement in RJC. However, limitations should be taken into account when interpreting the outcomes, emphasizing the need for ongoing exploration and tailored interventions. Further research and practical considerations are crucial for refining and tailoring RJ approaches for cases of sexual offenses to better address the multifaceted needs of victims and their families. The journey towards this approach involves not only reevaluating punitive measures but actively involving the public in a restorative and transformative justice process.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Informed consent

Dear Participant,

this study is conducted by a student undertaking the Bachelor of Psychology at the University of Twente. The data will be analysed and used for a Bachelor thesis. The aim of this research is to investigate the most important needs of the public after an offense, which is here defined as acquaintances of victims of sexual offending. This will be assessed by reading a crime scenario and imagine being in the role of a related person to the victim. This crime scenario involves talking about sexual offenses.

To take part in this study, it is required that you are at least 18 years old and that you have sufficient English skills.

It is fully your decision whether you want to complete this questionnaire or not. Your data will be processed anonymously, no identifiable information will be taken from you. You can withdraw from this study at any time; the data you have entered will be deleted and not used for analyses. This study has been reviewed and approved by the UT ethics board.

This survey will take approximately 20 minutes to complete. Students at the University of Twente who participate in this study will receive 0.25 credits on Sona.

I hereby declare that I read the information about the study. I know that the participation is voluntary, that data will be processed anonymously, and that I can withdraw from the study at any moment, without indicating a reason. I understand that taking part in this study involves reading a crime scenario about sexual offending and answering questions about RJC. If you have any questions, feel free to contact the researcher via email:

c.c.janowski@student.utwente.nl

I agree and give my informed consent.

Appendix B: Crime Scenario

Maya is a 17-year-old girl, focusing on her school performance and enjoying her teenage years. She was left home alone for the weekend. Her idea was to throw a party at her parent's house and inviting some friends over. Leo was one of them. He is already 22 years old. He had to redo some classes, but now he is in his last year of high school. Maya's best friend, Alice came over earlier to help with the organisation of the party. They went to the shop and bought some alcohol. The party started and everyone was there. They drank a lot of alcohol; everyone was having fun. Leo came to Maya and talked to her about how beautiful and special she was. He told her that he wants to talk to her in a quieter room. They went into her room and talked. Suddenly, Leo started to touch Maya. She was very uncomfortable. He told her that she is a very special girl and that he wants to sleep with her. She already drank some wine, but she told him that she does not want to sleep with him. He was upset and continued to touch her. She tried to go away, but he held her. The music was too loud to scream for help, her body was too weak to protect herself. She did not do anything, because she was shocked. After the offense, Leo left the room and continued to party. Maya was left alone sobbing in the room, not realising what has happened. After one hour, Alice found her sobbing on the floor. She could not talk, she only stared at the wall. You arrived the next day and found Maya and Alice on the floor of her bedroom. Maya started to talk about the offense and was brought to the hospital, where the crime was also reported to the police. Leo was arrested after the report, he told the police that he was very drunk and did not realize that Maya was not willing to sleep with him.

Appendix C: Information RJ & RJC

After the police file has been processed, a judge is assigned to the case. Considering the emotional impact, the sexual offense might have caused for the victim and the offender, the judge thought that it might be a good idea for the direct involved parties to have mediated contact and talk about what happened and why. Mediated contact is an example of restorative justice. Restorative Justice is an alternative approach to dealing with crime. It offers the opportunity to repair harm, promote accountability and fostering healing among the parties involved, instead of focusing on punishing the offender. It gives the offense back to the originate parties: the victim, the offender and the community.

An example of this is restorative justice conferencing (RJC). In conferencing the direct involved parties of a crime come together and have a facilitated dialogue about the offense, its impact, and solutions to repair harm. It is a voluntary process. Both Leo and Maya would like to participate in RJC. As a direct acquaintance of the victim, you are also invited to participate in RJC.